



agriculture

Department:
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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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MEDIA RELEASE

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Pest alert: Change in status of Goss's Wilt (*Clavibacter michiganensis* subsp. *Nebraskensis*) of maize in South Africa

The Department of Agriculture (DoA) hereby notify growers, farmers, community members and all South African citizens on the change in distribution status of Goss's Wilt (*Clavibacter michiganensis* subsp. *Nebraskensis*) in South Africa.

Goss's Wilt was first detected in four provinces of South Africa in 2024, namely, Free State, North West, Gauteng and Eastern Cape. Following a comprehensive delimiting survey conducted in 2025 to assess the extent of its spread, the disease was subsequently confirmed in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and Western Cape. To date, no detections have been recorded in KwaZulu-Natal.

The department, in collaboration with research and industry partners, continues to advance efforts to manage the disease. This includes building a culture collection of *Clavibacter* isolates representing South African strains, enhancing diagnostic and surveillance capacity for bacterial diseases in maize, identifying tolerant or resistant cultivars suitable for local conditions, promoting knowledge exchange between farmers, researchers and policymakers and developing practical and region-specific management guidelines.

Goss's Wilt is regulated under the Agricultural Pests Act, 1983 (Act No. 36 of 1983) and Control Measures R.110 of 27 January 1984, as amended in 2025. The primary objective of regulating Goss's Wilt is to prevent the spread of the regulated pest to pest-free areas in the Republic by restricting movement of host material and agricultural equipment such as harvesters from infected areas to non-infected areas.

Maize (*Zea mays*) is the only known economically important host of the pathogen. Over short distances, the disease can be spread within a field by contacting leaves on adjacent plants, while over long distances it can be spread through seed, even though seed-borne transmission

has shown to be very limited. The bacterium can also be spread by equipment such as harvesters, planters, or tillage implements that operate in an infected field because contaminated plant debris can adhere to surfaces of such equipment. If that equipment is then moved to another field, especially across districts or provinces, it can infect new fields in new areas. Goss's Wilt is a serious bacterial disease in maize and there are globally no recorded chemicals that work against this disease.

Management relies on integrated cultural practices, including the use of resistant maize hybrids, crop rotation with non-host crops such as soya beans or small grains, minimising the movement of infected crop residue between fields, avoiding mechanical injury to plants, and maintaining strict hygiene of farming equipment. While seed transmission is limited, movement of contaminated equipment is a credible and important pathway for long-distance spread and must specifically be addressed in on-farm biosecurity measures. International travellers and traders are further reminded to refrain from the illegal importation of agricultural products and used farming equipment into South Africa, as such actions pose a significant risk of introducing new pests and diseases that are costly and difficult to manage.

Biosecurity starts at home and is everyone's responsibility. Guidelines on how to manage the disease can be found on the DoA's website through the following link: <https://www.nda.gov.za/images/Branches/AgricProduceHealthFoodSafety/PlantProductionHealth/PlantHealth/Early-Warning-Systems/Advisory-notes/goss-wilt-on-maize.pdf>

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